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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE — Radio Service — OFFICE OF INFORMATION

HOMEMAKERS' CHAT Tuesday, June 13, 1939

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS," Information from the Bureau of Chemistry and Soils, United States Department of Agriculture.

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Another Tuesday -- and another batch of questions just out of the mail-bag and ready for answers from the scientists. This week most of the answers come from chemists in the Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Chemistry and Soils.

The first question is one that's sure to come up as soon as the weather gets hot and moist: "How can I keep mildew from growing on my books?" The lady who asks this question goes on to say: "Last summer the bindings on a number of my books were badly stained with mildew. And now just lately mildew has started again. What can I do to prevent it?"

Answer: If you keep your books in a closed book-case, lime will help save your books from mildew -- plain unslaked lump lime in a can or two behind the books. You can buy lime at any feed and fertilizer store, or at any building-supply store.

As you've noticed, mildew thrives in a damp warm atmosphere. Whenever the relative humidity goes above 60 percent, both cloth-bound and leather-bound books are likely to mildew. You see, the book-binding absorbs moisture and also provides nourishment for this particular fungus. (Mildew is a fungus, you know.)

The best way to prevent mildew is to keep the books in a dry atmosphere. You can keep books dry even in humid weather if you place a can or two half filled with lump lime on the shelf behind the books. The lump lime absorbs moisture from the air so the air in the book-case will be kept fairly dry.

You noticed that I said the cans should be half filled with lime. That half is very important. Lime expands as it absorbs moisture. So if the can contains too much lime, it's likely to overflow on the shelf.

Will a can of lime do this job of absorbing moisture permanently? No. When the lumps fall to powder, the lime has been slaked with air. Then you must replace with a fresh supply of unslaked lime.

Now what to do about mildew if you keep your books on an open shelf? One good way to keep off mildew is to paint the covers with colorless lacquer. Lacquer keeps the bindings from absorbing moisture. It also helps prevent any damage to books from roaches or waterbugs.

This question about mildew on books reminds me of another question often asked about mildew on shoes. Here's one that came in the other day: "How can I keep mildew from growing on my leather shoes? As soon as we have a summer rainy spell, I find my shoes covered with mildew."

Answer: If you keep shoes in a warm, damp, dark place, they are almost certain to mildew. So if possible keep shoes in a well-ventilated, dry, light place. If you keep them in a tightly closed closet or shoe box, a can or two of lime will keep them safe and dry just as it does books. Whenever you see the first signs of mildew on shoes, wash it off with soap and warm water, or simply wipe it off with a damp cloth and then dry the shoes thoroughly. Mildew will not seriously harm shoes unless it stays on them too long, but it may stain the leather.

Now here are two old perennial questions that come up regularly winter or summer, fall or spring. The first one is about aluminum cooking utensils: "Are aluminum cooking utensils harmful to health? I have been doing my canning and jelly-making in aluminum kettles but my neighbor has just told me of a rumor that foods cooked in aluminum can cause some sort of disease."

Answer: That rumor is false, according to medical authorities, chemists, and all others who have investigated. These authorities agree that no possible harm can come from cooking in aluminum. You can cook all your food in aluminum pots and kettles and expect to live to be as old as Methuselah, as far as aluminum is concerned. It's true that foods cooked in aluminum may contain very slight traces of aluminum salts. But these salts are harmless unless taken in large amounts. No possible harm can come from the tiny traces you might get from an aluminum kettle. Cookery experts recommend aluminum cooking utensils because they are perfectly safe and are also good conductors of heat; because they are light and easy to handle; because they are easy to keep clean; and because they are relatively inexpensive. Any rumor as to danger to health is quite wrong.

The second old perennial question is the one about food in an open tin can: "Please tell me whether food which has stood in the can after the can is opened is safe to eat? I've heard that when the can is open, the metal acts on the food and poisons it."

Answer: That's another old and false rumor. The can does <u>not</u> poison food, whether it is open or not. Food is just as safe in an open can as in an open bowl. Of course, if the food has stood too long, it may have spoiled. That's something else again. The metal of the can has nothing to do with spoiling. But you can feel perfectly safe about opening a can of tomatoes, or peas, or fruit, or anything else; using part of the contents; and then putting the rest away in the refrigerator right in the can. In fact, the can is often the most convenient and best place to keep it.

That's all the questions today. More next Tuesday.

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